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SUBJECT: AMNESTY BILL PASSES UPPER HOUSE, NO RELIEF FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS

Ref: Minsk 898

(SBU) The appointed upper house of the Belarusian parliament, the Council of the Republic, unanimously passed an amnesty bill November 16. No changes were made to the draft that previously passed parliament's lower house October 24; the draft will become law when signed by the president. The bill reportedly would grant amnesty to up to 2,550 persons and would save the GOB approximately BYR 2 billion (USD 930,000) annually. This amnesty is unlikely to extend to Belarus' six internationally recognized political prisoners (reftel) as they either have been cited for severe violations of prison administrative rules or have not already served one-third of their sentences.

Stewart